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ABSTRACT

Throughout their history, Americans have believed that citizens' fulfillment of their individual duties in a participatory democracy is at least partly met through the forming of groups around important societal issues. Given the complex nature of political socialization, this study investigated identifiable determinants of social action that might be used to advantage in educating young people for citizenship in a democracy. This study attempted to differentiate among junior high, high school and college students (N=517) who were inclined and not inclined to act on their concerns about nuclear threat with selected demographic, psychological, political, and educational variables. The results of a discriminant functional analysis indicated that in comparison with the non-action group, students in the action group were characterized by reporting less trust in government, more exposure to sources of nuclear war information, more political knowledge, a more liberal political orientation, a stronger sense of political efficacy, a more internal locus of control, and perceptions of their parents as having a more liberal political orientation. (Author/ABL)

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Student Concern and Potential Action Regarding Nuclear Threat

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Abstract

This study attempted to differentiate students inclined and not inclined to act on their concerns about nuclear threat with selected demographic, psychological, political, and educational variables. The results of a discriminant function analysis indicated that in comparison with the non-action group, students in the action group were characterized by reporting less trust in government, more exposure to sources of nuclear war information, more political knowledge, a more liberal political orientation, a stronger sense of political efficacy, a more internal locus of control, and perceptions of their parents as having a more liberal political orientation. The results are discussed in light of their implications for education for social responsibility.

These Americans are the most peculiar people in the world. . . . in a local community in their country, a citizen might conceive of some need that is not being met. What does he do? He goes across the street and discusses it with his neighbor. Then what happens? A committee begins to function on behalf of that need. All this is done by private citizens on their own initiative. The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens (de Tocqueville, in Heffner, 1956, p. 201).

What are the necessary preconditions for participating in a complex and diverse democracy? With recent developments in China, Eastern Europe, and many parts of the Soviet Union, we have witnessed an aroused citizenry eager to participate in democratically motivated changes in economies, governments, and political systems. In some cases, changes are sweeping and wholesale and almost seem to be made "in the street." In the United States, citizen groups form around salient issues such as abortion, arts endowments, pollution, and the environment. Throughout their history, Americans have believed that citizens' fulfillment of their individual duties in a participatory democracy is at least partly met through the forming of groups around important societal issues. In Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life, Bellah

(1985) and his co-authors state, "Implicit in this penchant for 'getting involved' is the peculiarly American notion of the relationship between self and society. Individuals are expected to get involved - to choose for themselves to join social groups." (p. 171)

Thus, participation in a democracy and the joining of social and political groups to further democratic ends begins with the individual and the individualist tradition. But how do individuals, who are constantly bombarded with messages about public and social concerns, choose to shed their individualistic, self-serving interests and engage in complex public activities with limited personal gain and often uncertain outcomes?

The social-cognitive model presented by Bandura (1986, 1989) can serve as a springboard in attempting to unravel, and to some extent illuminate this process of socialization for the public life of group membership. The triadic model of reciprocal causation suggests that the locus of human agency is a function of interactions between personological factors (such as cognition, affect, and motivation), behavior, and environmental factors (such as family, socialization, and education). Simply stated, through a complex web of reciprocal interactions, people must come to believe that group membership and collective effort can effect desired goals in social and political systems in a democracy. In addition, these beliefs must be maintained in the absence of immediate external reinforcement. The ego-

centric needs of the individual must be placed secondary, at least temporarily and/or situationally, to the group goals of social responsibility.

And yet, Bandura (1989) is quick to point out that people are very likely to avoid those events that might in some fashion reduce their sense of personal or political efficacy. This is a particular problem for many who wish to participate in social action groups. Typically, the problems addressed, whether abortion, homelessness, AIDS, or (in the case of this study) nuclear threat, often seem well beyond the grasp of any single individual or group of individuals, no matter how well they are informed or organized. In addition to motivating individual and collective effort, the notion of efficacy also seems to contain the anticipation of negative experiences and may give rise to self-doubts about public involvement.

This reluctance to become personally involved, even in social issues deemed to be important and relevant, often becomes a significant deterrent to effective social action; a matter which has recently become the subject of general societal concern and debate. Gilbert (1988) gives perhaps the most comprehensive account of the "dynamics of inaction" particularly with respect to the issue of nuclear war and the activities surrounding arms control. He is basically interested in describing those factors that disrupt or inhibit the connection between a strong sense of purpose or conviction and subsequent social action. While his work is

largely focused on nuclear issues (as is this study), his observations are consistent with more global considerations of why individuals may choose to remain inactive in the face of various pressing social concerns. Of a total of seven barriers identified, he groups three as "factors affecting restrictiveness." (p. 756) These are: (1) the perception that being antinuclear is equated with being unpatriotic, (2) the pressing demands of daily living tasks, and (3) a lack of economic benefit for activism. Factor one seems to reflect a current view of patriotism as uniform and free from tension and conflict. Factors two and three appear to indicate meaningfulness is constrained to instances of personal and immediate service and gain (Kleg, 1990).

Gilbert's remaining barriers are characterized as "factors affecting certainty." (p. 758) These include: (1) uncertainty about the correct action to be taken, (2) the absence of a perceived urgent danger, (3) an abiding sense of powerlessness, and (4) a lack of pertinent data and information (expertise). A study by McClure and Russo (1986) seems to confirm one important aspect of Gilbert's conjectures. Using a variety of social issues with 298 college students, it was found that respondents were likely to become engaged in social action only with those issues they perceived as affecting their immediate personal and professional aspirations.

Returning to concern about nuclear threat, Fiske (1987) argues that while people often freely express strong

beliefs, attitudes, and feelings about social issues such as nuclear war, action does not typically follow. In her very extensive review of studies in this area, she concludes that demographic factors such as gender, age, and socioeconomic status do not present themselves as reliable predictors of social action. Fiske presents a cogent argument that while many people are knowlegeable about nuclear war and profess to hold strong anti-nuclear beliefs and attitudes, when it comes to acting on these concerns, "most people do nothing." (p. 210) As many others have done, she attributes this inaction in part to a weak sense of political efficacy.

Despite the rather pessimistic picture portrayed by these barriers to social engagement, young people continue to join groups and find avenues for participation in public life. Berman (1990) states: "Social responsibility - that is, a personal investment in the well-being of others and of the planet doesn't just happen. It takes attention, intention, and time." (p. 2) It is, in other words, a product of socialization toward political efficacy and a systematic and progressive removal of the impediments to action that Gilbert (1988) and Fiske (1987) describe. Nelson (1985) maintains that a necessary ingredient for later social action is to experience a profound sense of personal relatedness to the issue at hand. He further states that awareness is necessary for "response-ability" (sic) and that these are recursive qualities depending on a sense of hopefulness and helpfulness for their nurturance

and fulfillment. While some individuals may avoid participation, due to a lack of perceived saliency (Gilbert, 1988; McClure & Russo, 1986), others may come to perceive a personal connection with events that only indirectly impinge upon them. The pivotal question, of course, is Why?

Merelman and King (1987) have studied political activists with respect to political socialization. As might be expected, they found that political activists possessed a greater sense of efficacy than their less involved counterparts. In turn, they suggested that efficacy might be related to an internal locus of control. Additionally, their group of political activists were more "ideologically coherent" while at the same time being able to analyze political events and policies largely free of predetermined political sentiments. Early socialization was deemed to be an important process in distinguishing political activists from those who avoided political participation.

How is it then that individuals develop the self-efficacy, as well as an action orientation, which prepare them to participate in the most pressing social and political issues of our times? Given the complex nature of political socialization, are there identifiable determinants of social action that might be used to advantage in educating young people for citizenship in a democracy? Using nuclear threat as a current sociopolitical issue, the purpose of this study was to explore potential deter-

minants of social action, by discriminating between groups of students inclined and not inclined to act on their concerns about nuclear war.

Method

Subjects

The initial subjects participating in this study included 517 junior high, high school, and college students from urban, suburban, and rural public schools located in the midwestern United States. One-hundred ninety-five 8th grade students, 136 high school seniors, and 186 college juniors and seniors were included in the sample. Two-hundred sixty-one males (50.5%) and 240 females (46.4%) participated, with 16 respondents failing to report their sex on the questionnaire. The respondents ranged in age from 13 to 49 years, with a mean age of 18.6 years (SD = 5.4). Four-hundred sixty-one subjects (89%) were White, 36 (7%) were Black, and the remaining 4% reported their race as Hispanic, American Indian, or Asian; an additional 8 students did not report this information. Father's educational level was used as an estimate of each respondent's SES. Fifty-eight students (11.2%) reported a level of education for their fathers of less than high school, 167 (32.3%) reported their fathers were high school graduates, 108 (20.9%) reported some college, and 158 (30.6%) reported their fathers were college graduates. Twenty-six students did not provide this information.

Instrumentation

Several measures were obtained for each respondent. The author-constructed questionnaire attempted to tap salient demographic, political, psychological, and educational variables that might differentiate students inclined and not inclined to act on their concern about nuclear threat (see also Lyon & Russo, 1989). The questionnaire consisted primarily of Likert-type items, but also included a number of factual fill-in-the-blank or multiple-choice items, and was 95 questions in length. Additionally, two standardized psychological instruments were administered to each respondent.

Demographic variables. Respondents self-reported their age, sex, grade, school, race, mother's race and educational level, and father's race and educational level.

Political variables. Respondents provided information that was grouped into a number of political variables. These included: (1) perceptions of their parents' political orientation and attitudes (i.e. liberal, moderate, conservative); respondents' (2) internationalism perspective (i.e. local, national, international interests); (3) political orientation (i.e. liberal, moderate, conservative) (4) party identification; (5) political efficacy; (6) general political knowledge; (7) specific views of the Soviet Union (i.e. "evil empire" sentiments); (8) perceptions of civic obligations (i.e. personal duties

required of citizens in a democracy); (9) trust in government, and (10) interest in politics.

Educational variables. Respondents reported the number of times they had been exposed to educational materials or information from their parents, teachers, peers, church, or the media during the last year. They were also asked to record the number and names of classes taken in school which dealt directly with nuclear war; and the grades in school when such classes were taken.

Psychological variables. Respondents provided information on their world view (i.e. human nature basically good or corrupt) and completed two standardized psychological inventories. The first was a 12-item short form of the Intellectual Achievement Responsibility (IAR) Questionnaire (Crandall, Katkovsky, Crandall, 1965), which was used as a measure of locus of control. The authors of the IAR report split-half estimates of internal consistency (corrected by the Spearman-Brown formula) ranging from .54 to .60 for young children and .64 to .80 for adolescents. Test-retest reliabilities after a two-month interval ranged from .66 to .74. Ample evidence exists for both the criterion-related and construct validity of the scale. In the present study, a KR-20 estimate of internal consistency of .54 was obtained for the 12-item short form of the IAR.

Respondents also completed the Trait form of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Form Y) (Speilberger, 1983). The Trait scale is a 20-item measure of generalized anxiety.

Separate norms for junior high, high school, and college students are provided. Test-retest reliabilities for the Trait scale have been reported to range between .73 and .86 and ample evidence exists for the validity of the inventory.

Concern about nuclear war. A 9-item Likert scale was constructed to assess students' concern about nuclear war. The questions were based in part on a study by Blackwell and Gessner (1983) in which adolescents' fears about nuclear war were explored. The items required the respondents to rate their concerns about nuclear threat in terms of thoughts, feelings, and potential actions that might be taken to express or operationalize these concerns. Two items on the concern scale directly addressed the issue of whether students were inclined to take action concerning nuclear threat through participation in and monetary support of citizen action groups. Subjects who responded "yes" to both questions were categorized as the action group in this study, whereas students who responded "no" to both questions comprised the non-action group.

Knowledge about nuclear war. A 28-item multiple-choice test of factual information about nuclear war was also completed by each respondent. The authors constructed this test largely from information contained in a Ground Zero (1981) quiz on nuclear war, although approximately one-third of the items were designed specifically for this project. An attempt was made to balance the difficulty of the items by approximating the following distribution of

difficulty levels: 25% easy items, 50% moderately difficult items, and 25% difficult items. The results of a pilot study with 40 subjects each from 8th, 12th, and colleged grades indicated that these conditions were aproximated. Six items had p levels ranging from .75 to .91 (easy), 4 items had p levels ranging from .35 to .40 (difficult), and 18 items had p levels ranging from .41 to .74 (moderately difficult). The mean p value for the entire test was .62. A KR-20 estimate of internal consistency was also computed for the knowledge test using these 120 subjects, yielding a reliability coefficient of .80.

Procedure

All questionnaires were administered during a two-month period. The three researchers and trained graduate assistants met with the respondents in intact classrooms varying in size from approximately 25 to 90 students. Respondents were first informed that the purpose of the research was to collect information on students' views of important world events. They were then instructed to complete the questionnaire in its prepared order, omitting no items, and given approximately 60 minutes in which to respond. Students who did not complete the questionnaire in the given time period were not included in data analysis and no attempts were made to follow up respondents who turned in incomplete questionnaires.

Data Analysis

Following assisgnment of subjects to either the action or non-action group, t tests for independent samples were performed between the two groups on all demographic, educational, psychological, and political variables under study. The major research question concerning which variables distinguish between subjects in the action and non-action groups was addressed with a discriminant function analysis using Wilks' lambda.

Results

As noted earlier, 517 junior high, high school, and college students were initially sampled. The methodology employed in this study, however, required that those students reporting they would take action on the issue of nuclear threat be separated from those reporting they would not. The procedure followed to accomplish this separation (described earlier) yielded a non-action group of 185 students (35.8%), an action group of 106 (20.5%), and a total n of 291. For the non-action group, 102 subjects (55.1%) were male and 81 (43.8%) were female. Sixty-two (33.5%) junior high students, 50 (27.0%) high school, and 71 (38.4%) college students were included in this group. Twenty-three (12.4%) students in this group reported their father's level of education was less than high school, 54 (29.2%) reported their fathers were high school graduates, 37 (20.0%) reported some college, and 57 (30.8%) reported their fathers were college graduates.

For the action group, 53 subjects (50.0%) were male and 48 (45.3%) were female. Thirty-four (32.1%) junior high students, 37 (34.9%) high school, and 33 (31.1%) college students were included in this group. Nine (8.5%) students in this group reported their father's level of education was less than high school, 40 (37.7%) reported their fathers were high school graduates, 17 (16.0%) reported some college, and 38 (35.8%) reported their fathers were college graduates.

The results of *t* tests for independent samples between the action and non-action groups on all variables are presented in Table 1. To control for experiment-wise error

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Insert Table 1 about here

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produced by multiple comparisons, Bonferroni's procedure was used, yielding an individual alpha level of .003 required to achieve significance for each comparison made. As can be seen, subjects in the two groups differed on four of the measured variables.

The major research question of the study concerning which variables might accurately discriminate between the action and non-action groups was addressed with a discriminant function analysis (See Table 2). Seven variables displayed some utility in differentiating the two

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Insert Table 2 about here

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groups, including: (1) trust in government ($F(1,206)=20.67$; $p<.0001$); (2) exposure to sources of nuclear war information ($F(2,205)=14.99$; $p<.0001$); (3) political knowledge ($F(3,204)=11.22$; $p<.0001$; (4) political orientation ($F(4,203)=9.12$; $p<.0001$); (5) political efficacy ($F(5,202)=7.78$; $p<.0001$); (6) locus of control ($F(6,201)=6.83$; $p<.0001$); and (7) parents' political orientation ($F(7,200)=6.05$; $p<.0001$). In comparison with the non-action group, students in the action group were characterized by reporting less trust in government, more exposure to sources of nuclear war information, more political knowledge, a more liberal political orientation, a stronger sense of political efficacy, a more internal locus of control, and perceptions of their parents as having a more liberal political orientation.

The classification results of the discriminant analysis are presented in Table 3. Using the seven variables identi-

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Insert Table 3 about here

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fied in this study, 75.0% of the students in the action group were classified correctly and 62.6% of the students in the non-action group were correctly classified. The total

percentage of cases correctly classified was 67.45%, or slightly more than two-thirds of the subjects.

Discussion

The present study was an exploration of potential demographic, psychological, political, and educational factors that might distinguish between students inclined and not inclined to act on their concerns about nuclear threat. Approximately 20% of the total respondents surveyed reported an inclination to act on their concerns via citizen action groups, whereas nearly 36% reported they were not so inclined. Of central concern, however, were those factors that aided in discriminating the two groups, rather than the percentages likely or unlikely to engage in action. As noted, students in the action group reported expanded opportunities to learn about nuclear war (exposure to sources), possessed more knowledge about politics in general, had a greater distrust of government, and a more internal locus of control. In addition, they reported a greater sense of political efficacy, a more liberal political orientation, and a perception of their parents' political views as more liberal than respondents in the non-action group.

Intuitively, these variables appear to have a certain coherence, for they seem to point to important socialization experiences (both formal and informal) as contributing factors to potential action on social issues such as nuclear threat. In fact, it seems not unreasonable to conclude that

the disposition to act appears highly malleable and amenable to cultivation through education and important socializing agents, such as parents, teachers, peers, and the media. It may be observed, for example, that six of the seven discriminating variables can be broadly construed as alterable, while the one static variable (parents' political orientation) may be simply a placeholder for the importance of parents' early political socialization of their children and youth.

Furthermore, among the alterable variables, political knowledge and exposure to sources appear to reflect content domains, largely reliant on the accumulation and integration of factual information and related bodies of knowledge. Such information is no doubt gleaned from both formal educational settings and through informal means, such as discussions with parents and peers, and through various media sources. Knowledge, however, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for social action, as Fiske (1987) has pointed out. Something more than mere mastery of facts and figures must undergird the propensity for action.

The remaining variables may offer some help, for they appear to be personological in nature. That is, they seem to represent psychologically and politically based attitudes and dispositions that are likely dependent on particular socializing experiences. Trust in government, political orientation and efficacy, and locus of control all seem to fit in this context. Taken together, these variables seem

to suggest that youth who are socialized to think critically about government and its functions in a deomocracy, to believe that personal and collective effort are potentially efficacious means of achieving desired social and political outcomes, and are imbued with a humanitarian political philosphy, are more prepared to act on perceived social concerns.

What then of barriers to action? We openly acknowledge that the systemic barriers to action articulated by Gilbert (1988) and Fiske (1987) are both real and formidable, perhaps increasingly so in the dehumanizing bureaucracy of contemporary government and the quickened pace of contemporary life. We agree with Gilbert that the time may be right for structured interventions to these problems such as the employment of full time peace activists (see also Vanini, 1985) who empower their constituents to become more personally active in social and political concerns. Nevertheless, it also appears to us that socialization for action holds some promise both for motivating individual and collective responsiveness to pressing social concerns and overcoming the barriers to action that so often short-circuit the democratic process.

The educational implications of our contentions are many. Most obviously, however, it would seem that any viable educational program dealing with social responsiveness would need to focus not just on fact and knowledge, but also deal directly with personal and systemic factors that

prepare people to act or hinder them from doing so. There is a critical need not just for the declarative knowledge that informs, but also for the procedural knowledge that enables individuals to transform knowledge and concern to purposeful action. The optimal learning environment might be one where the student is encouraged to critically examine basic social concerns and their assumptions, while at the same time learning about methods and mechanics of effective citizen action. Such an approach might suggest to students that government and other social institutions are the direct result of human purpose and action. Ways of resolving complex social problems could thus be understood as constructions emanating from a core of knowledge, beliefs, and individual and collective action.

Social action, of course, is a performance, and as such requires guided practice. This implies curricula vastly different than those typically employed in American schools. As Wiggins (1987) has pointed out, "Knowledge is usually presented by textbooks and syllabi as answers - already researched, sanitized, settled, and organized by the author or teacher into 'material to be learned.' Thus, the teacher or author has already done the academic inquiry - the analysis and synthesis. They are the . . . performers, not the students." (p. 11) The alternative proposed by Wiggins and his colleagues is the notion of "student as worker (performer), teacher as coach," in which the classroom's principal performers are students, not teachers, as in the

schools' athletic and dramatic programs. Rather than relying primarily on didactic instruction by teachers, this approach requires that students be confronted with "real world" problems that lead to authentic academic inquiry, and ultimately to proposed solutions to substantive problems. Clearly, such an approach includes action as one of its outcome components.

It appears to us that social issues and problems, such as nuclear threat, provide an ideal vehicle for this type of education. Initially, students need to gain a modicum of ownership for such problems through intellectual inquiry, not through rehearsal of prepared facts and figures. Such inquiry is not an end in itself, however, but should prepare the student for considered action on a variety of social issues. In this scheme, action becomes a logical extension of student inquiry and understanding, facilitated by study in the classroom, rather than something which presently seems to occur "in spite of" curricular content and methods.

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Table 1

Results of t tests Between Action and Non-Action Groups for All Variables

Variable	t	df	p
Parents' political orientation	0.67	263	.503
Internationalism perspective	0.22	288	.830
Exposure to sources	3.17	286	.002
World view	1.85	260	.065
Political efficacy	2.47	281	.014
Perceptions of Soviet Union	2.05	279	.042
Political knowledge	3.31	289	.001
Civic obligations	1.80	289	.072
Trust in government	5.29	288	.000
Interest in politics	2.79	289	.006
Nuclear war knowledge	0.64	289	.520
Locus of control	3.59	288	.000
Anxiety	2.38	287	.018
Party identification	0.19	283	.852
Political orientation	1.68	284	.008

Table 2

Summary of Discriminant Function Analysis

Variable	F	df	p	Wilk's
Trust in government	20.67	1,206	.0000	.908
Exposure to sources	14.99	2,205	.0000	.872
Political knowledge	11.22	3,204	.0000	.858
Political orientation	9.12	4,203	.0000	.847
Political efficacy	7.78	5,202	.0000	.838
Locus of control	6.83	6,201	.0000	.830
Parents' political orientation	6.05	7,200	.0000	.825

Table 3

Discriminant Analysis Classification Table

Actual Group	n	Predicted Group Non-Action	Action
Non-action	155	97 (62.6%)	58 (37.4%)
Action	100	25 (25.0%)	75 (75.0%)

Total percent of cases correctly classified = 67.45%